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ABSTRACT

A case study of 6 high school English teachers illustrates their attitudes, perspectives, and experiences as they became immersed in the first year of a collaborative inquiry community of school and university-based colleagues who redesigned a teacher education program together. Three major categories of growth emerged: (1) perceptions of English teaching; (2) understanding the role of mentor teachers; and (3) impact of the collaborative inquiry group on individual participants. (Contains 20 references, 1 table of data, and 4 notes. Appendix A presents an application form for a study of the National Reading Research Center. Appendix B presents an extensive discussion that focuses on issues of power, communication, and community; yearlong interaction and collaborative growth; and how teacher research connects theory and practice.) (Author/RS)

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NRRC National Reading Research Center

READING RESEARCH REPORT NO. 70
Winter 1997

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The National Reading Research Center (NRRC) is funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education to conduct research on reading and reading instruction. The NRRC is operated by a consortium of the University of Georgia and the University of Maryland College Park in collaboration with researchers at several institutions nationwide.

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Peg Graham is Assistant Professor of Language Education at the University of Georgia. She received her doctorate in English education at the University of Iowa after teaching English in public high schools for 17 years. Her research focuses on the conceptualization of mentoring roles and the influence of power, knowledge, and gender on mentor-teacher/student-teacher relationships. She has been a trainer of teacher assessors for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Early Adolescence/English Language Arts and a member of the redesign team for EA/ELA assessments for NBPTS certified teachers.

Sally Hudson-Ross works primarily with secondary preservice teachers and their mentor teachers in local high schools through the Language Education department at the University of Georgia. In 1993–1994, Sally exchanged jobs with Patti McWhorter, a local English teacher and department chair in another NRRC project entitled The SYNERGY Project. Insights they gained from doing one another's jobs as teacher educator and high school teacher for a year directly influenced the Collaborative Inquiry Project reported here. Details of the SYNERGY Project are reported in other NRRC reports.

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Complexities of a Collaborative Inquiry Community: Mentor Teachers' Growth within a High School English Teacher Education Program

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Abstract. *Cases of six high school English teachers illustrate their attitudes, perspectives, and experiences as they became immersed in a collaborative inquiry community of school and university-based colleagues who redesigned a teacher education program together. Three major categories of growth emerged: (a) perceptions of English teaching, (b) understanding the role of mentor teachers, and (c) impact of the collaborative inquiry group on individual participants. An extensive discussion focuses on issues of power, communication, and community; yearlong interaction and collaborative growth; and how teacher research connects theory and practice.*

Although the concept of "learning to teach" has been a primary focus of teacher education, only recently have researchers begun to systematically frame this question and study it carefully (Carter, 1990; Shulman, 1986a, 1986b). While previous studies focused on beginning teachers' observable behaviors or the skills needed for effective teaching in general, recent investigations explore teachers' developing knowledge and growing perceptions of their disciplines from an interpretive stance (Zeichner, 1987), and the critical role that the supervising teacher plays in the development of such perspectives (Goodlad, 1990; Graham, 1993). Shulman (1986a) has called for investigations which highlight: (a) the transformation of teachers' subject matter knowledge as they prepare and begin to teach; and (b) the development of pedagogical thinking in both novices and experts.

The purpose of our investigation was to examine how mentor teachers' and preservice teacher-candidates' knowledge about literacy teaching is acquired and develops over time within a collaborative, school-based teacher development program. This study focused on the attitudes, perspectives, and experiences of: (a) a group of mentor teachers (MTs) of secondary English as they became immersed in a collaborative inquiry community; and (b) a group of teacher candidates (TCs) as they were inducted into the profession through carefully structured experiences guided by a team of school and university practitioners who worked closely with them during a 1-year program.

The following questions guided our research:

1. How do TCs' and experienced MTs' definitions and concepts of English and of teaching evolve over time as a result of participation in a collaborative inquiry community?
2. How does their immersion in collaborative inquiry affect experienced teachers' and TCs' pedagogical choices in the classroom?

In this report, we will focus on the MTs' growth and change across the first year of the project as they interacted with university faculty, their MT peers, and their TCs. We first present an overview of the teacher education program we developed to establish a collaborative inquiry community. We then discuss specific research methodology that led to three major categories of growth for MTs. In particular, we illustrate from in-depth phenomenological interviews (Seidman, 1991) and participant observation field notes how MTs evolved in their perceptions of: (a) English teaching; (b) the role of MT; and (c) the impact of the collaborative inquiry group on their growth.

Overview of the Collaborative Inquiry Teacher Education Program

The teacher education program we designed was based on our own experiences as teachers, researchers, and teacher educators (see Graham, 1993; Graham & Hudson-Ross, 1996; Hudson-Ross & McWhorter, 1995; McWhorter & Hudson-Ross, 1996). Our Language Education Department's philosophy has long been based on the assumption that TCs should be educated in the same kind of supportive, stimulating, and student-centered environment that they are expected to provide for their students. We believe that teachers learn by observing their students, creating environments for learning, and having inquiring, open-minded views toward learning. (See Ellis, 1976, for historical basis of department in this outlook.)

We also firmly believe that teachers should be equal and contributing partners in the development and implementation of any teacher education program; that, however, has been difficult to arrange except informally. This NRRC project allowed 2 university faculty and 25 MTs to work together for twelve months[1] to develop a project which includes the following precepts:

- A group of MTs plan and collaborate with the same university faculty throughout the program including all campus courses, school activities, and professional and personal connections and on-going communication;
- Yearlong placement of TC with MT;
- Integration of campus methods courses in composition, literature, language, curriculum, and methods with school experiences;
- Teacher research as a world view (e.g., learning from and with students as a way to teach in both school and university settings); and
- School-based planning and curriculum discussions.

In this section, we describe how a program based on these precepts was initiated and developed in the 1994–1995 school year.

[1]We are now beginning our third year of the project, the last 2 without funding to support participation.

Table 1. Demographic Data for Six Participating High Schools

School	Number of Students	% European-American	% African-American	% Other Groups
A-1	1590	40	53	7
A-2	1440	45	50	5
B	1050	90	10	0
C	1096	90	10	0
D	1214	92	8	0
C	594	41	59	0

Selection of Schools

In the spring of 1994, English teachers from high schools in the counties surrounding the university were invited to apply to be participants in this teacher education project. (See application form in Appendix A.) We asked that teams of 2–5 teachers from one school apply together and that all be committed to professional and personal growth; otherwise, these are very "normal" teachers, not the exceptions, not doctoral students, not purposefully selected (Goetz & LeCompte, 1993) as "good" or "best" teachers or mentors. Six school groups, including 25 teachers, were invited to participate. Basic school data is reported in Table 1.

The six schools are in five racially diverse school systems, from rural to urban. Schools A-1 and A-2 are located in the school system of the university town and are similar to many small urban schools. Schools B and C are located within 30 miles of the university and are predominantly rural in nature. School B competes with a local city school system for students and is located near a thriving freeway mall area. School D is just outside the university town, is becoming more and more suburban, and has experienced significant growth in recent years. A large private school pulls some students from the area of Schools A-1, A-2, and D. School E is 50 miles from the university and predominantly rural.

Mentor Teachers

The MT group met once before the close of the 1993–94 school year to build relationships and receive an overview of the project. For many MTs, this meeting renewed old contacts from their own undergraduate and graduate days. Many had previously worked with the Language Education department as supervising teachers in a traditional manner (e.g., one academic quarter of student teaching) and brought concerns about that experience with them. Those attending the meeting remember

our frustrations of that night: school, students, our lives were exhausting and exasperating. We shared a common bond[2] in our plight, a bond that would change and deepen significantly across the year.

Investigators conducted semi-structured interviews with each MT in April or May focusing on their knowledge, beliefs, and practices regarding literacy teaching as well as on aspects of their literacy instruction which they would like to change. They were also asked about their perceived roles in socializing beginning teachers. These interviews provided a foundation for the current report.

During the summer of 1994, the MT group met weekly over potluck dinners to explore what student teaching supervisory experiences had been like for them, what they thought it should be, and how we could reorganize our program as a one-year in-school experience. Together the group read two texts, Mayher's *Uncommon Sense* (1990) and Cochran-Smith and Lytle's *Inside/Outside: Teacher Research and Knowledge* (1993). Topics discussed included what student teachers need to learn on campus and in schools, ways in which teachers can support TC growth, content of the on-campus courses, and how we could make teacher research a foundation for collaboration among all participants. MTs received a stipend for their participation.

This time was used to build trust and a sense of community, a critical component of the project, and very clearly to devise a program for which we had no map. Mentors were at first distrustful of university faculty, unsure of what the agenda might be, and expecting to be "used" in ways to which they were accustomed. Tensions ebbed and flowed, but MTs and university faculty worked together to build meaning. One example from a July transcript when some teachers began to distrust the concept of teacher research is illustrative. (Sally and Peg are the university faculty; all others are MTs.)

Chandra: I think I'm confused.

Sally: Good, you're honest.

Chandra: What is the collaborative inquiry?

Sally explains her perspective of the project.

Peg: Does that seem to be what you got in here for?

Chandra: I felt that I was involved in more than one thing. TCs, collaboration . . .

Peg: It is complex. That's the way our school works also.

Susan: I think that this is, as I have read and been in here, this is different. I thought the focus was totally on the TCs and what if they spend a year under our wing instead of a quarter. I sensed that it might focus on how . . . , I was just helping you out by taking on the student teacher. It might be a pain. As we have moved more and more and read the proposal and listened to you talk, I realize that my own teaching is being held up for scrutiny. I'm being asked to do more theoretical thinking and

[2]This is no idle statement. At the time, Hudson-Ross was teaching high school full time in a job exchange with Patti McWhorter, a co-investigator and one of the MT group, and Graham was just out of graduate school after 17 years in the secondary classroom. (See Hudson-Ross & McWhorter, 1995).

research about my own teaching. I think I have mixed feelings. I misunderstood or things were so vague. It would be easy to feel I'd been misled. On the other hand, I'm not opposed to holding up my teaching for scrutiny. In reading the book, I find me and my colleagues do this; we just don't keep the written record. I think that good teachers do that already. They are talking about problems and saying things that aren't going right. I'm wondering if in November or January if there might be a little bit more though . . . .

Dena: My confusion is like Susan; I don't know if I fit in. I don't know if I pass. I have a fear of the unknown.

Lillian: What if they come to me and aren't sure I know what to do. Can I help a TC if I'm examining my own teaching?

John: The concept of what we'll do with the TC. I've had this feeling . . . that this person is just out of college. . . . They've been through lots of theory and stuff; they're current. I'm not reading the research; they are. My fear is that they will be more on top of this than me.

Barbara: I hope I'm not jumping in. . . . What's going to happen is when the theory doesn't work, you'll be there to help them adjust. It's almost that you learn in hindsight, by doing.

Roger: When I first read this proposal, I hadn't had a TC in years. I thought "I'm going to learn something myself." I did not even think of the TC. I'm tired of doing things the same way, and I want to refurbish my whole program. That's when I saw that not only would the TC be involved but also other teachers in the building. We could strengthen the department somehow. So that's where I was in coming to this. I didn't read, I scanned. I didn't see the TC extent as backbone of all of this.

John: I've been thinking about the research aspect. We have research, TC, and our input. All three have to meld. How would it be if the school itself, there are 6 of us and the 6 TCs, how would it be if we worked more as a group of 10–12 as a research team? Maybe we could work regularly, not so in isolation. I had the same feeling: How will this help me? I've felt stagnant. This way we could work together and have TCs there. . . .

Eventually across the summer, MTs came to realize and appreciate that they would be major players and decision-makers in this program. Together, the group began to confront—but not always resolve—important issues and learned to like one another. Full understanding of a new relationship continued to emerge across the year, as we will explore below.

MTs agreed that they wanted to continue to meet. Therefore, MTs met each quarter both in small groups of school representatives and as an entire group to continue to build community

and to negotiate issues of mentoring and program experiences and goals. As a result of our discussions, two TCs' placements were changed to make better matches, MTs came to rely on one another as resources for mentoring questions, and solidarity across schools continued to grow.

MTs met all day on May 9, 1995 (with substitutes paid by the project), to assess the year, and they met during the summer of 1995 (without financial support) to plan the second year of the project. Five teachers chose not to or were unable to continue into the next year as full-time mentors, and one school was dropped as a result of teacher resignations. However, 5 new MTs (recommended by their colleagues for having a positive outlook, collegiality, and interest in professional development) joined us and the project continued in 1995–1996 with 20 new TCs in five of the six original schools.[3]

Teacher Candidates

Also in the spring of 1994, 21 preservice TCs, 8 undergraduates, and 13 master's students (one dropped out in December due to personal problems) self-selected themselves into this experimental "field center" rather than a traditional field center also offered in the Language Education Department.[4] They met for one hour in the spring of 1994 and by July submitted a resume and cover letter addressed to their (at that time unnamed) MT.

Importantly, the MTs had decided that a group composed of one representative from

[3]During the 1995–1996 school year, the program will be expanded to 16 schools, some 60 MTs and 50 TCs (in two separate groups), and 4 university faculty who teach all courses in the program, supervise school time including student teaching, and teach one graduate course each outside the project—all within normal course loads at a major research institution.

[4]The university Language Education Department has prepared secondary English teachers for certification in grades 7–12 for over 20 years through a nationally recognized teacher education program (Ellis, 1976). The program consists of a comprehensive series of courses and professional activities culminating in the Advanced Professional Education Course Sequence (APECS) the final year. Students are either undergraduates or seeking certification through a Modified Master's program.

The undergraduate major is based on a strong liberal arts core including 20 hours of introductory English, a foreign language and a cross-cultural course (often Teaching for Cross-Cultural Understanding, or a similar course designed to introduce students to a culture other than their own), public speaking, arts, sciences and math, and physical education. The English Education major then takes 55 hours in field, including 40 hours in English, linguistics, drama, and/or comparative literature at the junior or senior level.

The final content hours begin the APECS with the three departmental "gateway" courses, Literature Study in Secondary Schools, English Language Studies for Teachers, and Composition in Elementary and Secondary Schools, Completing the APECS are two quarters of Field Center—English Curriculum in Secondary Schools, Methods of Teaching English in Secondary Schools, and Teaching Reading in Secondary Schools, plus 15 hours of Student Teaching. All courses in the APECS are part of the current study.

The Modified Master's program is open to students who have the equivalent of an undergraduate degree in English. Through the 60-hour program they complete education and APECS requirements and further graduate courses for the master's degree. Many students are "mature," having returned to school after 1 or more years in business, journalism, or other fields.

each school, in collaboration with the university faculty, would make student-teaching placements using the resumes and cover letters. Placements were announced to the mentor group at one of the summer meetings, and mentors then wrote to their assigned TC to announce the placement and welcome them to the program and their school for the preplanning week.

TCs began the 1994–1995 school year with a 2-week practicum at their schools including preplanning and the first week of school. They set up classrooms, arranged books, produced materials, sat in on meetings, got to know the staff, ran errands that helped them identify locations in the school and became known there.

The School/University Program

Hudson-Ross and Graham, the two university professors, were assigned to teach five courses (all courses for these TCs except one winter-quarter course through another department) and supervise the student teaching of all 20 TCs during the entire school year. The professors spent preplanning week in schools interviewing and helping to do mundane but necessary chores (e.g., copying handouts, painting walls, running errands, collating, numbering books, etc.). Throughout the year, we continued to be a part of the six schools in special, somewhat unique ways. We visited to observe MTs and their students so as to understand TCs' classes, we chatted informally as friends, we sat in with TCs as they began to teach classes, and we continued interviews for data collection and program input.

Once university fall-quarter classes began, TCs were engaged in 15 hours of coursework (Teaching of Writing, Adolescent Literature, and Language Studies for Teachers) team-taught in an integrated fashion by Graham and Hudson-Ross during four mornings on campus; TCs also spent 12 hr in the school each week, including all day Monday and at least one afternoon. During the winter quarter, this arrangement continued with campus classes shifting to afternoons (including Curriculum, Methods, and the Teaching of Reading which was taught by a separate professor). At school, TCs observed classes, managed classroom chores, became familiar with materials, interacted with students, got to know their schools, visited other schools in the project, and gradually began planning and teaching lessons or short units. Most importantly, TCs got to know the high school students they would teach both through the course of normal classroom interactions and through their own research (see below). They came to be recognized by both teacher and students as a teaching and learning partner in this setting.

We made every effort to connect campus work to TCs' experiences in school. Each week, TCs and the two university professors wrote "think pieces"—freewritten, typed papers, 3-5 pages long, reflecting on a burning issue for them in school at the time. For an hour on Friday, we read and wrote notes to each other in the margins; from the read around, a discussion of these issues evolved. Think Pieces were recognized by all participants as an especially powerful community-building aspect of the program.

As we read professional books and articles, TCs also conducted research projects with their students. Analyzing and sharing data in class confirmed and added depth and reality to our readings. In four whole-class projects, TCs taped and transcribed everyday student conversations as language samples; interviewed and surveyed students about reading, writing, and adolescent culture; examined written products; and videotaped students reading and writing. They also wrote profiles of themselves as learners, writers, and readers. Together the class shared and compiled their data for each project. Using standard research processes (Hubbard & Power, 1993), they sought patterns or themes across the data first in pairs, then in groups of four. Finally, each TC took all compiled findings of the class, applied them to their own situations, and reflected upon them in an extended journal (Graham & Hudson-Ross, 1996). In almost every case, TCs came to see the obvious link between what students told them and what they had read or discussed in classes.

In an independent research project, TCs were to develop questions with their teachers, collect and analyze data, and develop a presentation for a state conference of English teachers (see McDuffie & Graham, 1996). We learned a lot about this process during this first year. TCs assumed this was their own research project, and many did not explain the project they chose to do with their MTs or engage them as participants. While this effort to examine, interpret, and share their own classroom findings with the larger profession led to a heightened sense of professionalism and worth among the TCs, the MTs were left out of the process to a large degree. (We changed the focus in the second year to a MT-sponsored question to greater success. As MTs learn more about and gain more respect for teacher research, they are taking on stronger guidance and leadership roles with their TCs as co-researchers.)

In further efforts to connect school and university experiences and knowledge, a weekly bulletin written by university professors was distributed to all TCs and MTs to keep everyone informed of work done, decisions made, and opportunities available (conferences, etc.). MTs maintained dialogue journals with their TCs throughout the year, and reading and responding to these allowed university faculty to stay in touch with issues emerging at schools. Patti McWhorter—a co-investigator, Hudson-Ross's job exchange partner in 1993–1994 (Hudson-Ross & McWhorter, 1995), and key school colleague—and other teachers and high school students presented information, participated in panel discussions, and worked in support roles with TCs and university faculty in the campus setting.

Throughout the year, TCs encountered material that was new—and sometimes antithetical to what they understood schooling to be. On campus and often in teacher workrooms, TCs read current texts and journals on teaching English language arts through writing as a process, reader response, and language-based, meaning-making approaches. Often these resources struck cords of relevance to them, and they were ready to attempt recommended methods. Sometimes, methods were discounted as not possible, or inappropriate. Strong, successful English majors, many TCs were

uncomfortable with the workshop-based, student-research-centered approach to the classes. They were encouraged to argue these issues—teacher-centered versus student-centered, grading and evaluation, content versus students as the core of the curriculum, and so forth—with MTs and then explore them further in campus discussions, peer-read think pieces, and informal and formal talk with their university professors. Because they were teaching lessons themselves a little at a time, they came to realize that there were no easy answers. Most taught lessons that failed, but they were able to back away and assess the reasons.

TCs sometimes received mixed messages in their discussions with their school and university colleagues. We came to realize that such messages, when voiced by caring, committed members of the school/university community, are valuable, not misleading. They force TCs —and MTs and university colleagues—to think deeply and learn that they cannot rely on a correct answer. As TCs came to evaluate the credibility of what they encountered, they entered an honest professional dialogue. As they raised issues, MTs and university faculty were forced to bring their assumptions about teaching and learning to conscious levels for examination and reflection.

During the winter quarter, TCs, university faculty, and MTs engaged in collaborative planning for the spring quarter when TCs would take over full-time. MTs delineated the material and/or objectives to be covered, provided useful files and support materials, and brainstormed with their TCs. TCs brought these parameters to campus where whole-group workshop time was devoted to planning. By now, TCs had developed a collegial relationship. They trusted one another and enjoyed watching each other succeed. Although several still sought answers and replicable plans, most realized that planning depended upon their own students whom they had come to know well. Boundaries blurred as the work of the school pervaded TCs' lives. They continued to teach, write and share case narratives of their experiences, and hear from teacher and student panels (by choice focused on multicultural issues), but their planning processes eventually took precedence. By March, TCs had researched, planned, and had accepted by their teachers all plans for spring quarter. All of these activities encouraged the development of a community of learners, one in which all of us were researchers, learners, and respected contributors. They also led to the evolution of an emerging, shared knowledge among participants.

TCs taught four classes full time in the spring. Many MTs now took on the role of research assistants, providing feedback and data for discussion rather than playing the traditional evaluative role. University supervisors visited each school every other week to observe and/or talk with TCs and MTs, and conducted weekly seminars on campus. TCs entered student teaching confident, planned, eager, and unstressed. They knew students, place, colleagues, reliable resources, and procedures; they recognized that learning—and even failure—is what teaching is about; they understood the pace and demands of teaching (although they were very tired); and they continued to think as teacher researchers. Dialogue journals begun in August continued

and blossomed, and TCs met with the two university professors in weekly after-school seminars to continue the teacher talk they had come to depend on earlier in the year. Not all lessons were successful, struggles continued, but in general, relationships became stronger. Within this community, TCs had many dependable colleagues to turn to in times of need.

TCs met on June 8–9, 1995, to compile all project data that had been copied and collected for and by them, to organize and review that material, and to write reflections on their experiences. As a result of their input and that of MTs, we moved into our second year of the project with clearer assignments, experiences, and materials. Of the original group of 21 TCs, 1 had to drop out due to family problems, 1 chose to attend graduate school in another field, and the other 19 were hired by September and are currently teaching middle or high school English in Georgia.

Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis

Data for the entire project include two structured interviews with each MT, one prior to the project and one at the end of the first year; five interviews with each TC in August, October, December, March, and June; and written reflections from MTs at a full-day debriefing meeting in May and from TCs as they reviewed all of their own data (listed below) during the 2-day debriefing meeting in June. We collected the following data from TCs throughout the project year:

- class papers and weekly "think pieces"
- research projects including one presented at a state professional conference
- dialogue journals with their MTs
- portfolios and syntheses of their work each quarter
- lesson and unit plans
- high school students' work with TC responses and grades
- assessment and other teaching materials
- written observations by MTs and university supervisors
- video- and audiotapes of TC instruction in classrooms (taped by the TC)

Analysis for this report focuses on the repeated, in-depth phenomenological interviews (Seidman, 1991) with MTs and on primary investigators' participant observation field notes. These data were analyzed inductively and compared continuously until patterns emerged (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Goetz & LeCompte, 1993). The major patterns discussed below focus on the evolution of MTs' definitions and concepts of English teaching, the role of the MT, and the impact of the collaborative group.

MTs Growth and Shared Knowledge

Most of the 25 MTs had previous experiences with student teachers placed for only one quarter in the schools. Although all MTs realized unique relationships with their TCs in this yearlong program and illustrated varying degrees of growth as a result of their new and extended mentoring experience, we would like to deal with six strong MTs and the changes they underwent as examples of patterns revealed across the group. The six MTs discussed include seasoned veterans who have taught more than 15 years—Fern, Sheila, and

Laura—and experienced teachers who have taught fewer years—Debbie, Betsy, and Celeste.

When the MTs applied to participate in the model program, they each evinced a strong interest in personal and professional growth, appreciating the complex demands and uncertainties surrounding their work. We assumed that many definitions of effective teaching existed and that teachers who wanted to grow professionally would represent a number of different starting points. Therefore, we did not seek teachers who had "arrived" at a particular definition of English teaching, but instead embraced the wonderful range of good teaching possible. All six of these teachers worked from a firm foundation of beliefs about *English teaching*: Celeste and Betsy grounded their teaching in a strong set of student-centered theories, believing that students' needs and interests should guide most of a teacher's decisions, and that learning should connect meaningfully to students' lives; Debbie and Fern were moving toward more student-centered learning opportunities in their classrooms as a result of deep reflection on past practices and selected "failures"; and Laura and Sheila felt a more teacher-centered pedagogy suited their students' needs and their teaching personalities. Each teacher's concept of the *mentor role* was an outgrowth of their beliefs about teaching and learning; beliefs that were affirmed, elaborated, or modified as a result of their partnership with their TC and/or the larger collaborative inquiry *community*. Identification with the MT community in this program also had implications for how teachers viewed themselves as professionals.

Definitions of English Teaching and Perceptions of the Mentoring Role

Betsy. Both Betsy and Celeste entered the MT-TC relationship convinced that students should be the center of curricular and instructional decisions. Betsy had taught for 10 years and thought of herself as a facilitator, one who "traveled together" with her students from "different beginning points each year." As a teacher who concentrated on "knowledge that students *must* own in order to become life-long learners," she emphasized students gaining "knowledge about self." As a result, Betsy was keenly aware of the need to adjust both her curriculum and her instructional methods to fit the students who walked through her door at the beginning of each school year. Unlike most other MTs, she felt she had moved beyond dependence on units she could pull out of her file cabinet each year, opting instead to reinvent her teaching based on her students' "beginning points." Not only did she want to understand her students as individual learners, but her goal was for students to "understand and accept who they are as readers, writers, and learners." Her overall goal as an English teacher was for students to "push themselves to do something they haven't done before," reflect deeply on those experiences, and gain self-esteem in the process. A good example of what Betsy wanted her students to experience in English class occurred when she gave an exam that required students to revise a paragraph they had written and placed in their writing folders. "And they had to go through this whole reflective questioning of what was good, what was bad, how they're going to fix

it, what are their strengths. And [one student] came up to me and said, 'This is the first time revising for me wasn't rewriting it neatly.'"

Similarly, Betsy was convinced no "one right way" to teach English existed. As a younger teacher, she had "mimicked" highly successful teachers in her school and became dismayed when those teachers changed their ideas about teaching over time. Laughing, Betsy explained her "teaching story": "I was Patti McWhorter's student teacher. I did everything like she did and damn it, she went and changed. How dare she? How dare she?" Betsy realized the "idols" she had copied were constantly evolving as teachers themselves, a realization which positioned her to see teaching as "an evolution" and confirm her belief in constant growth and change. "Being a teacher and being an educator means you are constantly shedding skin and you never find the right way to do it. There isn't one right way. It's not like filling out the papers to close a house. It's not like how you open a bank account. It's constantly changing." But Betsy was quick to point out that her evolution as teacher was not simply a search for a bag of tricks to pull out on Monday morning. She believed one of the biggest problems in education was that "we are so hungry for something that works that we grab at everything. It's almost like the grease is on fire on the stove. Baking soda, not enough. Flour, oh, what a mess . . . Get the warm water running so we can clean this up and turn on the fan—we're just constantly looking for ways to make it better and sometimes we don't think through what we're looking at." Betsy, however, had thought through what she was looking at in her classroom.

Betsy's grounded theory of teaching and learning predisposed her to embrace the opportunity to work with a TC, anticipating how a TC could promote reflective practice and contribute to her growth as a teacher. "I want a TC who is a listener because I want to articulate how I got where I am and where I want to go. My TC needs to see teaching is an evolution and none of us wants to be a stagnant professional—even if at that stagnant state, we are teacher par excellence." At the same time, Betsy didn't envision her relationship with a TC to be a one-way conversation, but rather a "partnership" in which the two of them supported each other's inevitable evolution/development as teachers. She felt that she was committed to allow the TC "room to experiment and grow while providing nurturing support."

Thus, Betsy's ideas about English teaching had strong implications for her TC partnership. Just as she placed the development of individual students with their many different "beginning points" at the center of her teaching concerns, she realized that she would be at different points, too, and anticipated that TCs would arrive in her classroom with varying degrees of preparedness to work with teenagers. In Betsy's opinion, the most successful TCs were the "ones that taught day camp, or the ones that are youth directors at church. I think the ones that really flounder, they think [teenagers] are all like they were, and they're not."

An important aspect of Betsy's mentoring grew from her realization that she did not want or expect her TC to be exactly like her. She insisted student teachers "observe teachers

around the building . . . master teachers with different styles—from the comic that gets kids through humor to the strict disciplinarian whom every kid adores and [for whom s/he] toes the line. I want them to see all the different styles and appreciate them."

Having worked with several outstanding TCs in the past, Betsy was prepared to "spend this year practicing all the things I've learned about being a supervising teacher." But the sustained relationship with Frank, her student teacher, moved the experience beyond her expectations of "focusing on skills such as proximity, asking . . . questions, opening a lesson, closing a lesson, bridging lessons, building for transfer. What I found was a team-teaching situation that was a joy to be a part of each day. I taught, I learned, I shared, I'm spoiled." For example, one class period during their winter quarter study of *Hamlet*, Betsy was confronted by a sobbing student whom she took out of the room. "When I came back Frank [had] started class. He's so intuitive about what needs to be done. And so I just sat down until he came to a stopping point and he looked at me and I picked it up and then when I got stumped, I looked at him. And I think especially for second period class, which is our largest group of seniors, we've really presented a team, two people working together, not one person doing what the other person says." Like others in the mentor group, Betsy was able to move beyond the conceptualization of mentor as "supervising teacher" and realize a genuine partnership based on MT and TC as a "team."

Celeste. Like Betsy, Celeste had tried throughout her four-year teaching career to imitate the "great successes" she had read about in her teacher education program and throughout her master's program. Most recently, though, she had become more dependent on her knowledge of students and the student-centered theories she embraced to guide her curricular and instructional decisions. Celeste sought to know her students well. She had come to realize that "even though I lived in this county for all my life, I never realized [many students had] different needs, different backgrounds; school is not a priority when you're coming from a home where you don't feel education is important." She wanted to help kids "find an appreciation for reading and writing and find some way to make it useful in their lives." Although she worked in a school that dictated particular texts be covered in the English curriculum, Celeste contested such tight control, explaining it worked against her major goals for the applied communications students she taught. She sought to find "something that works for each student," particularly "lower level kids." "I don't feel that our curriculum is really doing them justice." As a teacher, she wanted more flexibility: "So if I get a group of students that maybe *Julius Caesar*'s not going to work for them or *Tom Sawyer*'s not going to be appropriate, I don't want to have to feel the pressure to struggle through it, you know, and waste their time."

Celeste wanted students to become appreciative writers and readers who could connect those skills to their lives, but she also cited "learning to respect each other" as highly important since many students were "close-minded" or "wore blinders" about anyone different from them. In an effort to promote better relationships among students, Celeste

wanted to provide an "environment where they feel safe" and have opportunities to work collaboratively with one another. The past 4 years had been "experimentation every day" for her, but she thought she had "become more in tune to my students' needs, if nothing else . . . a little more confident and a little more flexible in when and what works for them at the time." Those experiences convinced her that collaborative learning experiences motivated kids and led to better learning.

Clearly, Celeste considered herself to be evolving as a teacher, and her one previous experience with a student teacher had convinced her that she was unsure how to enact the mentor role. She recalled that "when I would give suggestions, [the student teacher] took that as criticism and I didn't mean it that way at all . . . what little experience I have, I was trying to give her some hints." In August, Celeste conceptualized her mentor role as "I'm there as a guide." However, the yearlong relationship between Celeste and her TC, Adele, produced a partnership more descriptive of equal-status interactions, one mutually beneficial to TC and MT. Celeste described it as "getting to know Adele by us working together, rather than her coming into an automatic role where I'm somehow above her and she's below me and I'm always telling her what to do. . . . She came in and I could say, 'Well, this is my perspective on this,' and she could say, 'Well, I saw this a different way.' I mean, you don't ever have those opportunities. I can tell a colleague about an experience in the classroom; but until they see it, they can't really give me their perspective of it. . . . I can't imagine not having another person now." In Celeste's case, her mentor role actually helped to shape her ideas about English teaching. She felt less isolated with a teaching partner with whom she could construct options and entertain possibilities about teaching dilemmas she faced. But most importantly, the experience encouraged her to assume a teacher-researcher stance which offered her a powerful way of viewing her own classroom.

Betsy and Celeste did not significantly alter their views of English teaching during their experiences with their TCs except to affirm their beliefs and encourage both of them to use teacher research as a way of knowing even more about their students. Betsy's department had been involved in The School Research Consortium (SRC) of NRRC for several years, so she had designed and performed teacher research, written about that experience (Tatum, 1995), and was convinced f its efficacy. Celeste found that having another adult in the classroom made it possible for the first time to interview students and collect data which "validated" her teaching. She explained that she could not "even put into words how much it's meant to me to be able to learn these things about the students. It has really validated . . . my teaching [that] they do feel they have learned something worthwhile." In that respect, having another adult in Celeste's classroom enabled her to collect data she needed to support her student-centered theories about English teaching. In Celeste's words, "it's priceless to have that other person."

Debbie and Fern also wanted to create a more student-centered approach. As teachers who earlier in their careers had practiced more teacher-centered approaches and watched their

students' interest fade, they were determined to learn from their "failures" and revise their practice in order to engage students more actively in learning.

Debbie. Debbie was "constantly thinking" about how to make what she was teaching more relevant to her students' lives. She felt that goal, however, was particularly difficult because of the controlled currriculum she was given. She thought that "most of my students don't like to read, and they struggle with *The Scarlet Letter* and *Julius Caesar*." After 11 years of teaching, Debbie felt frustrated about how English class unfolded and articulated her most pressing concern: "I'm still trying to figure out how to cover as much as I have to cover in a less painful way for all of us. . . . For the last couple of years I've rushed so through a curriculum in order to present a curriculum, that I'm not sure I'm actually teaching students." Debbie wanted to develop a practice that was more sensitive to her students' individual needs, but because she was also teaching upperclassmen, she felt the pressure to cover a large number of required texts for college—a tension that undermined her major goal to "give students tools to find out more. . . . I want to give students a way of finding out more." As a particularly nurturing teacher, Debbie enjoyed warm relationships with her students and was disturbed when student engagement did not match her expectations. In order to address that felt need, Debbie turned to her most valued source of inspiration and information for ideas about how to change her pedagogy: "I went to every other teacher I knew that I was able to sit and talk with and asked, over and over and over again, 'What works for you, how does it work, why does it work, what works with a particular student, how do you take care of this?' I just asked and asked and asked and asked."

In some important respects, Debbie's conceptualization of the mentor role was conflated with her conceptualization of her teacher role. For example, in much the same way she wanted to "give" students the tools they needed to become independent learners, she also wanted to "give" TCs what they needed to know about teaching. Her complaint about a previous student teacher had been that he was "not willing to listen to what I had to say, thought he already knew everything and . . . I was just somebody who didn't know anything. . . . He needed to listen to me." In August, then, Debbie expected that she would function as a source of information for a TC in much the same way her teaching peers acted as sources of knowledge for her, answering her many questions about how and why particular practices "worked" for them.

What may have been a sufficient mentoring stance with student teachers from the former program, however, seemed insufficient to Debbie for the new program that fostered a collaborative inquiry approach and development of a TC across an entire school year. Instead of merely "covering the curriculum" a preservice teacher should have in the allotted 10 weeks, Debbie was able to establish the more "collegial relationship" she had envisioned previously but lacked the luxury of time to realize. Across their yearlong relationship, Debbie and her student teacher, Roberta, like Betsy and Frank and Celeste and Adele, developed as a teaching "team," a partnership which

was "like two horses pulling instead of one." Because she had learned so much through her own "failures," Debbie focused on sharing those failures with her student teacher. As she explained, "I've had failures in the classroom and Roberta has seen that I have. And then we just went on from there, looked at it, what happened, what went wrong. Okay, can we improve this or do we junk it?" Instead of passing on answers, Debbie allowed the team to focus on her own failure and what could be done differently. As a result, she became a learner with Roberta, not an all-knowing source of information.

The centerpiece to their MT-TC relationship was their joint research efforts. Poised to explore her teaching practices in some systematic way, Debbie began to exploit the potential offered by the teacher research projects her TC brought to the classroom. Eventually, the two of them were very deliberately collecting data in order to address specific questions and concerns about their students, such as how to document a problematic student's behaviors in order to convince the mother that a problem existed ("It was great because she could be very unobtrusive about it; whereas when I was trying to do it when Roberta was not in the classroom, he knew I was documenting"), or their collaborative research into the question of why a particular class did not do homework ("Roberta interviewed the students and talked to them about their attitude toward homework and their reading, and did this wonderful research project, finding out that even some of the students we thought were doing the reading weren't"). What was particularly worthwhile for Debbie was having Roberta present as a research aide to document student responses and behaviors early in the year while Debbie was teaching. Together, they used the data to make decisions about what teaching strategies were effective with particular students/classes, what activities to retain and what approaches to alter. As a result of that experience, instead of assuming the evaluative, judgmental stance of a supervising teacher when her student teacher took over classes, Debbie simply reversed the researcher role with Roberta, providing her with the descriptive information Roberta needed to reflect upon her own teaching decisions.

In a very real way, Debbie's altered vision of the MT-TC relationship fed into her questions about her English teaching, providing her with a systematic way to reflect upon why her students' were or were not engaged. Debbie also used a dialogue journal with her student teacher, a reflective "tool" she found to be "quite valuable." She admitted that she "hated sitting down and writing, but it has made me clarify my thoughts, and it's let me know what Roberta's thinking or let her know what I'm thinking."

Fern. Fern had taught about 4 years longer than Debbie, but had undergone dramatic philosophical changes in those last 4 years of her teaching career. She described the change as "drastic," as she moved from a completely teacher-centered approach that included lecture and resistance to any kind of cooperative learning or group work, to a much more student-centered pedagogy. Fern had carefully observed her students and eventually realized that she "wasn't succeeding and that the classroom was becoming almost a battlefield." A highly reflective teacher, she knew she "just

wasn't doing a good job—the students weren't happy. I wasn't happy, and so I try new techniques constantly." For the past several years, she had consciously sought to remove herself from the position of "knower" and encourage more student talk and interaction. As a result, she felt happier and more "relaxed" in her professional life, believing her students could teach her as well as learn from her.

Her relatively new outlook on English teaching had implications for her mentoring role. She anticipated her student teacher, Jake, would be a new source of knowledge for her. But the more important growth for Fern resulted from the teacher research she conducted *with* Jake. Fern and Jake used a behavior journal early in the year. At Fern's invitation, Jake described in their dialogue journal everything he observed during Fern's teaching including students' time on and off task, what preceded those behaviors, what triggered problems and what engaged students. Fern's classroom appeared less and less like a "battlefield" in her eyes as she pinpointed specific moves on her part that allowed the lesson to "break down." In addition, rather than merely trying "new techniques constantly," Fern was able to analyze her teaching more deliberately and speculate about cause-effect relationships.

That kind of learning also encouraged her to critique her past relationships with TCs. She felt that she had a "tendency not to give praise. . . . And that's one of the things I wanted to work on this year. I've been aware with past TCs that I haven't given enough praise." Ironically, however, she had come to question whether praise was something Jake really expected from his MT, and whether praise would offer TCs the benefits she had imagined. By the end of their yearlong association, she anticipated future TCs might require more praise, but each TC was going to have a unique set of needs. She saw learners—teacher candidates or students—as individuals with different points of view on effective social interactions and power relationships; as a result, she viewed even simple answers such as, "Praise the TC more," as dependent upon future contexts and personalities.

From their different beginning points, both Debbie and Fern made conscious efforts to expand the boundaries of their past teaching practices; not surprisingly, they found many of the tentative answers they sought by conducting teacher research with their TCs. In effect, TCs assigned to conduct research about their students as readers, writers, speakers, and members of adolescent culture mandated MTs' observation and participation in teacher research efforts. Both Debbie and Fern had had limited exposure to teacher research, but Debbie spoke for many of the teachers in our group when she said, "I always thought that for research to be worthwhile, I had to have control groups, as well as experimental groups, great statistical numbers, and formulas. The simple research done showed me that I had been doing research for years and it was and is worthwhile." More sure than ever that student-centered classrooms were the direction for their pedagogies to proceed, Debbie and Fern were equally sure students could become the sources of the data they needed to inform their change processes. As a result of their collaborative inquiry with student teachers, they felt confident about how to collect that information

systematically and looked forward to using teacher research methods more extensively the following year when they would again have TCs from the yearlong program.

Other MTs in the program found a teacher-centered approach to be more effective in their classrooms. We feel this is important to emphasize since our program does advocate teaching English language arts through writing as a process, reader response, and language-based, meaning-making approaches. At the same time we seek change in traditional schooling culture, however, we realize that effective teaching cannot be clearly defined and assumes many faces. Sheila and Laura, each having taught for more than 23 years, defined their practice somewhat differently from the previous four MTs, but similarly benefited from the yearlong experience with TCs.

Sheila. Prior to the project, Sheila described her teaching as "traditional." She wanted students to be able to "identify a time period in literature and recognize it when they see it again." She preferred working from a scripted plan since she was less comfortable being "spontaneous," or "shooting the bull" in her classroom. She gave oral quizzes that sent the message to her students that "this is your day to respond to my questions and let's see how you do." She tended to judge her teaching by how well students were able to perform on the test ("If the numbers are good, you feel like you've done well"), and believed a "controlled class" was not incompatible with students having "a good time." She felt teachers needed a firm grasp of their subject matter, needed to "be able to communicate with young people," and needed to maintain a certain "barrier" between students and teacher.

She had similar expectations for at the beginning of the year. That is, she expected that they would arrive knowing the "content area, professionalism—how to dress, act, get along with students." Likewise, she recognized that past "successful student teachers conformed to the way I want things done better than the [less successful student teachers] did." However, after spending eight months working with Grace, her TC, Sheila had developed a different outlook on mentoring and changed her concept of a TC "conforming" to the way she wanted things done. "I saw a lot of holes [in Grace's teaching] but I didn't want to give all—not that I could give all the answers—because I thought she'd learn more if she did it. . . . But I think [being allowed to fail] was a definite learning experience for her."

Sheila also realized that she and Grace did not like confrontation, a trait which she discovered about her TC over time, a shared attitude that made them "compatible." Although in August she had thought a dialogue journal would be too time consuming, she found it a useful tool when she needed to discuss difficult situations with Grace. "You can read between the lines a lot of times . . . and you see what's really bothering her or maybe what I've done is bothering her. And I think we respond better to each other that way."

Sheila was most affected by this experience of keeping a dialogue journal with her TC ("And I think if ever I'm not in this program, and I still have student teachers, I would use that tool"). In effect, the dialogue journal

became a kind of inquiry into their shared practice. Sheila and Grace wrote regularly, exchanging observations about students and conversing about new problems that occurred daily in their teaching life. It was also the first time Sheila had allowed herself the time to write in a journal, and she found the experience both exhilarating and educative. For the first time, she actually wrote in a way that she had asked students to write, "throwing it down" on paper without worrying "about punctuation and sentence structure." In August, she had described journals as being "repulsive." However, by the end of the year, she described the dialogue journal as a "valuable tool" that made her "feel like a writer" for one of the first times in her life, an experience that altered her thinking about the teaching of writing, in particular, and learning and teaching in general. As Sheila explained in May: "I guess my concept of English teaching has not changed, but I have become more open and willing to try, research, and experience different things whether it be from the [students'] suggestions or from my TC. My classes are more varied and more fun for the students and the teacher. My goals are to continue with the open-minded viewpoint of research and continue to benefit from the sharing" with a TC.

Laura. Laura, like Sheila, was concerned that students receive a particular content. She wanted students to know grammar "for practical usage things" and how to write. She lamented that TCs from the University "haven't known enough grammar for the kind of emphasis" it was given at her school. At the same time, she entertained the question "Why don't kids learn grammar even when I teach it so well?" She felt literature should be connected to students' lives in ways that would be meaningful to teenagers. And she had a special interest in the school's infusion program which placed special education students in her classroom and allowed her to team teach with the special education teacher. In recent years, she had "learned about writing process" from one of her previous student teachers. In that respect, she felt she had learned something useful from each of her student teachers, but she also felt the former University program exerted "too much pressure to do group work."

Although Laura described herself as a traditional and structured "cooperating teacher," one who had done the same things in her classroom for 23 years, she felt "like there are a lot of new things out there that I could do." She constructed her mentor role as co-learner with her TC, Brett, anticipating that he would bring new ideas to her classroom and revitalize her teaching while she helped him to "devise unit plans" and determine what he would teach during the spring quarter. The idea of a student teacher being a source of "new ideas" for the teacher established a fairly traditional way for Laura to learn from a TC.

In hindsight, the yearlong placement was important for Laura and Brett's relationship to be fully realized. Laura reported actually feeling intimidated by Brett early in their relationship as he observed her teaching because she was "unsure he always thought highly of [her] practice." Brett, an older graduate student in the program, acknowledged that the teacher image he had developed for himself differed from the one Laura exemplified. Without any direct confrontations about their

competing pedagogies, Laura's level of comfort was strongly challenged by Brett's implicit judgments of her teaching. As a result of those tensions, Laura reflected on her concept of the mentor role and revised it for the upcoming year to be more collegial.

Unlike Sheila, she had not kept an active dialogue journal with her TC, but influencing her thinking was the discovery that her TC's simple surveys and student interviews resulted in remarkable insights into her students' previous learning, their feelings about school and being an adolescent. In the future, she wanted to establish a more collaborative relationship with her TC by becoming more involved in carrying out teacher research. ("[Brett and I] have finally really worked together as a team," she said in May.) By the end of her work with Brett, Laura understood teacher research methods better and viewed research as a more powerful way to be a co-learner with her TC. Through collaborative research efforts, she could critique her practice by having better information about the learners in her classroom—data easily collected with her TC's help—and simultaneously establish a more authentic collegial relationship with her student teacher, one that would modify the impulse to judge teaching performances rather than to evaluate student learning.

Regardless of the beliefs that fueled their pedagogical choices or the influences on their conception of the mentor role, a strong pattern across these MTs' experiences grew from participation in teacher research and joint reflection with a TC. As Debbie said, she had begun to realize that she had conducted research throughout her teaching career, but without being conscious of *what* she was doing or *how* she was doing it, the effort felt "hit or miss." All of these teachers could now identify questions about their students and their practice and consider various ways to collect data in order to address those questions. In every case, their willingness to reflect on their practice resulted in some sort of affirmation or growth in their ideas about English curriculum and/or instruction, an experience which inevitably shaped their concept of the mentor's role. Laura and Sheila reassessed their prior expectations for TCs to "conform" to their ways of doing things in order to avoid failures, or for mentors to "judge" rather than "describe" their TCs' teaching performances. Both discovered the researcher role as a more effective stance for the MT, one they would be better prepared to implement in the upcoming year because they considered it a valid way of knowing and because it offered them "proof" that other teaching approaches were also effective with students.

Debbie and Fern uncovered both methods and means for systematically revising their practice; they posed specific questions about student learning and motivation, which they were able to answer tentatively by reflecting on the data collected by their TCs. Their realizations occurred during their work with TCs and allowed them to actually implement changes in their practice while they participated in the new program.

Celeste and Betsy, due to their outlook on learning as socially constructed, entered very early into partnerships with their TCs; relationships based on shared reflections and genuine teaming approaches that altered the traditional

power relations between the mentors and their student teachers. Celeste experienced validation as a result of investigation into her students' voices and perspectives on her teaching, an opportunity made possible by the presence of another adult in her classroom. Betsy realized a team teaching situation that she consciously cultivated in order to reflect more deeply on her evolution as a teacher. Like many other MTs, Betsy found the sustained relationship with her TC enabled her to extend and deepen her inquiry into her own teacher evolution at the same time she helped her TC to grow.

Impact of the Group in a Collaborative Inquiry Community: The Mentor Perspective

When MTs first met in May prior to the initiation of the model program, they were exhausted. Many like Betsy questioned their decision to "volunteer for this program" since they were at a point of "burnout" from the demanding school year. However, that first meeting established a bond that revitalized and renewed teachers. Celeste commented that "from the first meeting in May, I realized we were all in this together, fighting the same type battles [politics, lack of parental involvement, lack of student motivation]. I received encouragement and strength from just knowing others were in the fight with me." Thus, the experience of expanding their professional network and breaking their shared sense of isolation quickly established their dependence on the MT group. The simple act of informal conversation with her peers allowed Debbie to "grow as I've been able to listen to other English teachers discuss problems and solutions in their classroom. I have had my own teaching confirmed as well as seeing other teachers' classroom practices confirmed for them." This sharing of professional uncertainties and insecurities encouraged Celeste to reconceptualize her world view of teaching: "Real teaching is about always taking a step, sometimes up and sometimes down, but I needed to learn to be happy with my small daily successes while planning for future ones." The experience of participation in a group of committed professionals also had implications for the mentor's relationships with TCs, department members, and school colleagues and administrators.

Teacher candidate partnerships. A shared view of teaching as learning characterized the MT group and allowed them to view TC partnerships as potentially productive and educative for the mentor as well as the preservice teacher. By using a collaborative inquiry approach, seasoned veterans like Sheila were able to adopt an "open-minded viewpoint of research and benefit from the sharing of the participants and the TCs." Shedding the evaluative stance of supervising teachers in the former program, the mentor group agreed with Debbie that "all of this has made me feel more like a professional who is constantly searching for answers and growing in my job." Laura's TC partnership prompted her to "look long and hard at my own teaching" and "make changes where I felt they were needed. I have learned much from working with Brett. We have finally really worked together as a team." Fern also realized she had "been more willing to relinquish control (in a positive sense) of my classes and [had] been more comfortable with the TC." As Laura and Fern pointed out, the work with TCs had the effect of simultaneously encouraging the MTs to scrutinize their own

teaching, perhaps because focusing their attentions on the TCs' development provided a safer vantage point for teachers to see themselves.

Department relationships. Department members applied as a group to participate in the model program, a move which insured that every MT had at least one department colleague who also assumed this newly defined mentor role. In many cases, their shared work with TCs reshaped relationships within departments. Even in a department like Betsy's where collaborative efforts were already well-established, she noted that "as we work together with student teachers on a yearlong basis, we have begun to share and mesh our philosophies of teaching and supervising. There seems to be more sharing of how to work with student teachers, and we have been able to get to know all the student teachers better."

In other departments like Debbie's, the group bonded personally through the shared role of mentor. "Our department has grown closer together personally as we have shared common goals, problems, solutions, and even our student teachers. Through common meetings and assignments, we have been able to get to know each other better personally and, thus, been able to share more." Celeste, from the same department, agreed: "Now that our student teachers have taken over, we actually have time to share teaching ideas and strategies and specific problems we may have in the classroom. This has been valuable both personally and professionally." Although this "release" time was available to cooperating teachers working within the more traditional student-teaching field experience, a lack of extended preparation time with TCs had kept MTs on alert and unable to relax and share. Similar testimony to the power of department collaborations were apparent when teachers from within departments petitioned to join the MT group when vacancies occurred in the second year of the program—even though there were no stipends for teacher involvement in Year 2.

Group membership and school status. Teachers spread the word about the model program most effectively within their own schools. For Debbie, the "impact of our all having had student teachers in the building all year has been interesting. Other faculty members have asked us what is happening, and we've been able to share with them the yearlong program. The idea of what we're doing has been met with only approval and approbation by all." In some schools, the mentors who had participated in the program were considered expert mentors by other supervising teachers in their schools. When student teachers from other programs that sponsored only a 10-week student-teaching experience arrived in Laura's school, she was asked to "talk to other teachers about problems and frustrations" the new TCs were experiencing. She and her department colleague "had group-wide sessions with around 25 [mentor] teachers and TCs" in which they "shared many things we have learned over the year, especially the journal writing." Sheila acknowledged that "administrators" were "enthusiastic" about the program and "other departments within the school [had] shown a marked interest." As a result, some of the mentors in the program were awarded an elevated status by their administrators and peers. Said one administrator in an unsolicited

note to the college, this approach "is a wonderful experience for preservice teachers. I recommend that other departments consider similar programs." As Celeste observed, "Other teachers are constantly asking questions about [the program]. I thoroughly enjoy telling people and having them say, 'Why hasn't anyone thought of that before now?'"

Summary and Discussion

We began our investigation by posing two questions: (1) How do experienced MTs' definitions and concepts of English and of teaching evolve over time as a result of participation in a collaborative inquiry community? and (2) How does their immersion in collaborative inquiry affect experienced teachers' pedagogical choices? Three aspects of our experiences in building a collaborative inquiry community of MTs, TCs, and university faculty have proved most valuable to build upon as we moved into our second year:

1. a conscious effort to change existing power relationships and communications among participants in the teacher education program;
2. yearlong placements of teacher candidates and interactions among all participants; and
3. teacher research as a way of knowing for teachers at all stages of career development.

We present our findings (in Appendix B) as an outline for further discussion.

School and university teacher educators seeking to replicate this program might do well to discuss these components with their own participants as they begin to shape their own brand of collaborative inquiry community. We imagine that no two groups of MTs and university faculty will evolve in exactly the same way. (We will begin a second field center with a new group of MTs, 2 new university faculty, and 50 TCs in the 1996–1997 school year to examine that assumption.) However, similar findings such as these across collaborative inquiry groups dedicated to teacher education may provide a rich new data source for future researchers wishing to explore novice and experienced teachers' growth in naturalistic, collaborative settings.

It is important to note in closing that this work is not done. New issues arise as the project continues:

- Can a new group of MTs create an equally stimulating collaborative inquiry community?
- How do MTs stay involved yet get breaks for private reflection in some years in their own classrooms?
- How do we select and initiate new MTs into the program and the shared history and friendship of the collaborative community?
- What effect will physical distance of schools from the university have on TC participation in school activities?
- How will other university faculty balance service, teaching, and research goals within this program?
- What impact does this program versus a traditional program have on the first years of teaching?
- Can MTs or university faculty continue to grow or will plateaus have an impact on the program?

We look forward, as teacher researchers, to exploring these questions and others that arise, knowing full well that our MT, first-year

teacher, and new TC colleagues are as interested in the results as we are.

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Appendix A

Application Form For
A study of the National Reading Research Center (NRRC)

APPLICATION FORM FOR
A STUDY OF THE NATIONAL READING RESEARCH CENTER (NRRC)

Primary Investigators:
Sally Hudson-Ross, Peg Graham, Patti McWhorter, Connie Zimmerman, Dana Fox

"Growing Together through Collaborative Inquiry:
Case Studies of Beginning and Experienced Teachers in Secondary School Literacy"

School System: _____

System Contact Person: _____
Position: _____

School: Name of school: _____
Address of school: _____
_____

School Administrator: _____
Position: _____

Phone number/school: _____

Participating Teachers:
(minimum of two per school; list others on a separate page)

Name: _____
Address (home): _____
_____
Phone (home): _____

Name: _____
Address (home): _____
_____
Phone (home): _____

Name: _____
Address (home): _____
_____
Phone (home): _____

Name: _____
Address (home): _____
_____
Phone (home): _____

Name: _____
Address (home): _____
_____
Phone (home): _____

SUPPORTING RESPONSE FOR OUR APPLICATION:
The school team should prepare and submit a response to show how they, as a group and individually, meet the following criteria for acceptance. The response may be in the form of a written proposal (5–10 pages maximum), creative resumes, a portfolio, a video, etc., or any combination thereof. Any creative and informative format is acceptable.

Our response, in the form of _____, shows that we
(write in type of response)
as individuals and a school team are:

1. committed to self-exploration
2. committed to mentoring beginning teachers
3. interested in improved teaching in English/literacy/reading
4. open and ready to grow, read, study
5. willing to lead among peers
6. at least two teachers in a school team
7. committed to a 2-year project
8. supported in this project at both the school and system levels

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT. Participants will:

* Sincerely explore own teaching, independently and with the group of teachers and student teachers
* Participate in all activities: seminars, group conversations, independent investigations, outside reading and writing
* Work with a student teacher in 1994–1995, including fall and winter practicums and full-time (turning over 4 classes) in the spring
* Agree to be interviewed by project members at convenient times
* Agree to be observed by project members at convenient times
* Agree to videotape your classroom at convenient times

We the undersigned have read this statement of commitment and agree to meet these requirements if selected for the project. We understand that no remuneration will be made to an individual unless all requirements are met by that individual.

Signature of school system official/contact person:

_____ Date: _____

Signature of local school administrator:

_____

Signatures of all participating teachers:

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Mail or deliver application and supporting response to:
Dr. Patti McWhorter, Department of Language Education,
125 Aderhold, The University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602.
(706-542-5674).

Appendix B

Outline of Findings for Further Discussion

I. Power, Communication, and Community

Equal status of university faculty and MTs means everyone is a teacher educator interested in the growth of themselves and all other participants. University faculty, MTs, and TCs perceive themselves as teachers who learn by conducting research in their own classrooms and beyond. All are involved in helping teachers learn to teach better.

A. *MTs form and work as a collaborative, on-going community of learners.* They meet in summers to enjoy one another, plan, and make placements; quarterly to negotiate, share ideas, and learn together; and year-end to wrap up and evaluate the year. Within the group it is acceptable to express concerns, discuss problems, admit failures, and celebrate successes. Concerned talk of students and schools is the norm.

B. *University faculty take on new roles.* They perceive themselves first as teachers, and secondly as teacher educators. They are often in schools, not to give help or judge or evaluate, but to observe and get to know individual high school students and classes, to support MT and TC needs, to provide everyday kinds of aide to teachers, to get to know the context of and players in each school, to chat informally as friends and colleagues, and to interview participants both for program input and to make their words available to participants for reflection. They respect all teachers and administrators as dedicated professionals at a variety of developmental stages and appreciate the difficulties of school-based work as a result of their own real and recent experience. They seek professional outlets for all participants to share and build on their emerging knowledge.

C. *School and university-based colleagues communicate often and openly, and respect and learn from productive disagreement.* Three-way dialogue journals, sharing of campus and school projects, weekly bulletins of events and opportunities and ideas, and constant interactions (phone, visits, e-mail) keep everyone informed and engaged in lively discussions of the contradictions and uncertainties of teaching and learning. The group moves away from seeking right answers from someone in authority to excited and thoughtful professional dialogue based on our own classrooms and research. Everyone's voice and experience is valued.

D. *In the meantime, TCs build their own community of peers.* Through interactive think pieces, dialogue journals, research projects, discussions, seminars, presentations at conferences, and so forth, TCs do not experience the isolation of teachers in the past but come to appreciate early in their careers the power of a collaborative inquiry community. They accept the fact that teachers feel pain, failure, frustration, and insecurity at times, but that these tensions are causes for teacher research, not for demeaning self, students, parents, or school. They build a closeness based on their shared endeavors.

E. *School-based assignments are privileged with campus time.* Teacher talk time, group analysis of research data from TCs' own classes, think pieces based on school experiences, and lesson/unit planning during campus workshops all lead TCs to realize that MTs and university faculty equally value their work and immediate felt-needs at the schools. Issues emerging from school drive the campus curriculum. It is okay to discuss the realities of preplanning, faculty meetings, curriculum mandates, the effect of homecoming on students, final exams, lesson plans, student crises, parent conferences, senior skip day, graduation, school board meetings and politics, book fine collection, racism, and grading policies, not just texts on teaching.

F. *MTs and their TC partners form teams for collaborative exploration of how best to teach their shared high school students.* Extended time to work together and equal status interactions allow MTs and TCs to avoid isolation and a judgmental stance, and reduce stress. Time and

opportunity allow pairs to address personal tensions, build trust, and become a team. Bonding occurs because "no one can see our kids as we do." As MTs gain voice in the program, they risk offering a similar voice to TCs about classroom practice, particularly as they come to know each other better over time. In some cases, that voice is also extended to high school students as well.

II. Yearlong Interaction and Collaborative Growth

Those who begin, continue, and end a school year together grow in important ways. They are able to collaborate within the natural cycles of school and students to build theories about learning and teaching. Teachers know that each school year is a story; it is difficult to enter late or leave early and truly understand what the story was about. As a result, short-term placements of student teachers lead to tensions for MTs (giving up their kids to a stranger) and TCs and university faculty (figuring out what's going on here), reduce collaboration to sharing "new" ideas from campus or survival skills from school (both detached from theoretical grounding), and leave little time for reflection or growth for participants. A yearlong collaboration forces new views of the roles of and relationships among MT, TC, and university faculty. In reconstructing these roles and relationships, all participants grow in productive ways.

A. MT growth across the year.

1. *All MTs enter a collaborative inquiry community at different starting points, and that is just fine*. All teachers can and do develop in their own ways if they are committed to personal and professional growth. MTs examining their own practice realize that they are the products of biography, school culture, gender, apprenticeships of observation, career stage, students, and prior experiences with student teachers. Acceptance of this stance with MTs as well as with students, is a major step in reaching a sense of equality (see above). Teacher education programs need not seek only "the best" teachers as models; instead, any willing teacher can be appreciated as a model of professional growth.
2. *Teacher research encourages awareness of one's own students*. As they learn with their TCs, MTs are likely to move toward more student-centered teaching in their classrooms. Data from their own students confirm the need for and effectiveness of new theories of learning and teaching in ways that no outside influence can.
3. *MTs' definitions of English influence how they mentor and may be altered as the mentoring role shifts*. As the mentor role shifts within the yearlong program to a teacher-researcher stance, MTs make subtle changes in their own work with students, thus changing their definitions of English over time, an inside-out rather than top-down conversion.
4. *MTs in a collaborative inquiry community have support for their continuing growth and joint reflection*. They are no longer isolated but instead have a range of partners across schools, in their own classrooms, and at the university.[5] They relax and see failure as learning and take on professional opportunities to share. The dialogue journal makes their own knowledge and learning visible to them as well as to the TC.

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[5] Most Professional Development Schools exist at the elementary school level. In the high school, commiting all teachers to shared development is more difficult primarily because of differences in departmental structures, needs, and goals. (See Grossman & Stodolsky, 1995.) Working in a content-based collaborative inquiry community across schools, however, provides the same rich opportunities for growth and comraderie at the high school level.

5. *MTs are free to be co-learners rather than all-knowing experts passing on unexamined practice*. If they have not already experienced it, MTs learn a teacher research stance from their TCs, a far more valuable classroom tool than the "cute ideas" from campus of the past. Fitting the old saying, it is far better to learn to fish than to be given one.

B. TC growth across the year.

1. *TCs, like their MTs, grow in personal and yet parallel ways*. Like their MTs, TCs begin at different starting points and arrive in different places by the end of their yearlong experience. Personal issues such as starting points, history as a learner, age and maturity, and time management and organizational skills influence depth and direction of growth as much as theory or opportunities to practice. As a result, development is unique for each individual. At the same time, however, shared experiences and emphasis on teacher research lead all TCs to some degree of more student-centered practice.
2. *A focus on teacher research across a full school year balances prior content-oriented apprenticeship of observation with in-school experiences*. As successful English majors, TCs enter the program seeking to be taught and to teach as they were most commonly taught in Arts and Sciences programs. Learning with and from their students counteracts their prior teacher or content-centered approach enough to lead TCs to recognize the value of attending to student needs more than content coverage. If we want a student-centered program, it makes sense to focus at least a year of attention on students rather than texts.
3. *A yearlong placement allows TCs to reach more deeply held and personally meaningful theories of teaching and learning*. Traditional or rotating quarters of school experiences require attention to a range of contexts, materials, inputs, and issues. A stable, yearlong experience, on the other hand, allows TCs to work through basic issues and stresses early on so that they can focus calmly on honing and living their theories in one school setting.
4. *TCs in a collaborative inquiry community receive the support needed to move beyond seeking answers to exploring options through teacher research*. Because they are allowed to experiment and fail early, return to campus for in-depth reflection, work through personal issues, and share tensions comfortably with peers, TCs come to accept the complexity of teaching in public schools today. They are less likely to blame and more willing to accept challenges as new opportunities to learn.
5. *Examining their own words across time allows TCs to observe their own growth and change*. By rereading transcripts of their own interviews[6], dialogue journals, papers, and research, TCs gain a broad sense of their own development. In effect, they become their own research subjects and are able to objectively examine their progress.
6. *Definitions of English and of the role of teacher are integrally entwined for TCs*. Tensions that each TC experiences are generally signs of a discontinuity between these definitions. Unconsciously, they strive to match their definitions so as to achieve a coherent theory for their own practice. Like MTs, TCs shift definitions of English as their concepts of the teaching role change. When the focus of a program is on developing a stance as a thoughtful, reflective teacher researcher, we suspect that improved content teaching follows. As one TC noted, "teaching is not separate from our own identity."

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[6] In Year 2, without funding for transcription, we taped and then asked TCs to transcribe their own voices from August preplanning interview, which proved to be invaluable for quarter-end portfolios and synthesis.

7. *TCs grow as a result of sustained interactions with a range of professional resources*. TCs in this program valued MTs, university instructors, texts, professional journals and conferences, peers, and especially students as sources of information. The collaborative inquiry community established in their last year of college is one that could continue to sustain beginning teachers, yet most do not carry with them or find such a community in their first year of teaching. Finding ways to develop collaborative communities for beginning teachers is a desperately needed area of program development and further research.

C. *University faculty growth across the year*. Although we have not focused on our own personal growth in this piece, we realize that our position as co-participants influences not only our own professional development but also our understanding of and compassion for the experiences of all other participants.

1. *Team-teaching allows university faculty to experience the partnerships that MT/TC pairs experience and to avoid the isolation of teaching at the university level*. Just like MT/TC pairs, we study our students (TCs) as a way to teach better. Because we accept the same role as teacher researcher in our setting, we understand the constraints, power, and requirements of such practice for all participants.
2. *Developing and participating in a collaborative inquiry community with MTs and one's students allows university faculty to combine service (staff development), research, anduniversity teaching in one co-reform effort*. Although we spent a great deal of time in the first year developing, maintaining, and revising this program, the second year runs smoothly with little extra time. In our second year, Graham will teach other courses while remaining a part-time partner in the winter and spring quarters. We have new time now to write, publish, and share our findings. We expect that as the community develops, we will find a balance that allows us to work comfortably within the context of a major research university setting.
3. *University faculty get to be a part of schools as team members*. We visit schools on a regular basis all year (once a month to weekly). We get to know administrators and other faculty and play important roles as support staff for very busy teachers. At all times, we consider our job to be finding out what people need and how we can help meet that need (materials, e-mail accounts, release time or travel funds through grants, a listening ear, another point of view on a special student or class). Our own need—to assist and examine novice and experienced teachers as they grow—is open-ended; therefore, we privilege the school's and individual teachers' agendas, not our own, as a requirement of honest collaboration. As a result, we do not lose touch with schools as living entities but constantly renew our sense of "the real world" and feel like valued and welcome colleagues.
4. *On-going collaboration with MTs provides a community of learners wherein we too are allowed to fail, experiment, grow, and learn*. As teachers, program managers, and colleagues, we are viewed by MTs as evolving and learning as much as they. Our word is not final, our program is not perfect, and our decisions are not arbitrary or disconnected from the group. As a result, we no longer feel like "they" when we visit, suggest changes, offer insights or assist. Instead, we are graciously considered partners.

III. Teacher Research Connects Theory and Practice

A focus on teacher research as a way to learn and improve teaching allows all participants at all levels to begin where they are and grow. Because TCs are in the schools working with their MTs and their shared students and because MTs and university faculty together explore how to better mentor new TCs, we all find reality-based connections between theory in texts and the profession at large and our own practice.

A. *The teacher research stance creates new safe and collaborative relationships for MT/ TC partners to grow within.* The TC serves as a research aide helping the MT see his/her classroom during the first quarters of the school year. As the TC learns from teacher research, the MT has an opportunity to examine collected data—which they are unlikely to have time to collect on their own—as well. During the spring quarter, the MT more easily accepts a role as research aide rather than evaluator. Both stances contribute to growth rather than judgmental observations. Partners provide a service to one another, all for the good of student learners.

B. *Keeping the focus on the learner (high school students or TC) helps both TC and MT to change self.* Traditionally, TCs perceive they are constantly being judged and must perform perfectly while teachers perceive they are to be "fixed" when engaged in staff development programs. Through a teacher researcher stance in a collaborative inquiry community, both TC and MT examine learners under their care and make more informed decisions as a result of collaborative discussions, writing, and experimental practice. TCs are able to move beyond a locus of attention on themselves and immediate teaching situations. This focus on the learner—rather than the participant—takes away a sense of threat and empowers MT and TC to be learners in ways and directions they want to go in a setting of mutual trust.

C. *Teacher research (interviews, shadowing, data analysis, think pieces) allows TCs to bring school experiences and questions to campus for comparison to the professional literature, the findings of others in other settings.* TCs value the time to and collegiality of reflecting on their experiences with early lessons, interactions with kids, and insights into the nature of schools. Their questions drive what happens on campus. Orchestrated readings and research questions and collecting and analyzing data from high school readers and writers does what no methods text alone can accomplish: with the hands-on approach of the teacher researcher, TCs prove for themselves that student needs and preferences are closely reflected in the theory and research they read.

D. *The advantages of a yearlong placement outweigh the benefits of multiple placements in a range of settings when TCs work within a collaborative community which shares experiences across school settings.* As teacher researchers, TCs compare data on similar projects across six diverse schools and a wide range of students. They hear the voices of 25 MTs and literally thousands of high school students in their collaborations as researchers. They visit each others' schools with knowledgeable peer guides serving as lenses for interpretation. Thus, although they do not get to teach in several settings, they learn from their peers' issues and experiences. Given that it is impossible in most programs to provide both a yearlong experience and multiple settings, we feel that the safety and depth allowed through the yearlong setting is enhanced by the spirit and shared knowledge which evolves within a collaborative inquiry community.

E. *TCs, MTs, and university faculty energized by new knowledge they have discovered in their own classrooms are inspired to contribute knowledge to the greater profession.* Professionalism and positive dependence among and between the MT and TC communities is also fostered by planning and presenting their research together at state and national conferences. Those experiences allow TCs to develop a better understanding of how to enter into the professional dialogue and how controversies we engage in on campus reflect those entertained within the English teaching profession. Likewise, MTs' professional influence and understandings move beyond the context of their individual schools when they attend conferences as participants in an extended collaborative inquiry community. Seeking affirmation, innovation, and elaboration of their practices, all participants emerge with a renewed sense of efficacy as English teachers and members of the larger professional community.

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